

**HOW DO MALAYSIAN-MUSLIMS UNDERSTAND
DAESH IDEOLOGICAL CRUSADE?
A STUDY ON ACCEPTANCE AND PERCEPTION.**

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ABSTRACT

Daesh's ideological appeals create unprecedented phenomenon and raise questions of why and how this terror movement could gather such a momentum of mass support from sympathisers all over the world. The movement's radical jihadi and takfiri Salafism with heavy influence from the Wahhabi theocratic ideas, attracts Muslim sympathisers from Middle East to Southeast Asia. Malaysia is no exception to this jihadi phenomenon. Those who were influenced by these ideologies were willing to sacrifice their life and properties. Some of them became suicide bombers and jihadi fighters in the name of Allah. This article is, intended to identify several key variables – acceptance, attitudes ad perception – of Malaysian-Muslims on Daesh ideological crusade. In this study, a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative was employed through survey and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Respondents were randomly selected. The survey involved 5,232 Malaysian-Muslims. They were purposely selected from three main groups– the general public, education, and defence and security. The samples were taken from six different zones: the north, south, central, and eastern region of the peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. Sixty people from the total respondent were chosen as the interviewees for the FGD. The result shows only 79.2% of total respondents could answer four questions out of nine correctly when they were tested their knowledge on Daesh. Only 9.2% respondents incline to support Daesh but the result is a major cause of concern since the majority of respondents are associated with and comes from two strategic government sectors - education and, defence and security. The survey also reveals that Malaysian-Muslims' acceptance and rejection to Daesh have been influenced by several factors such as, the lack of understanding on Islamic teachings, educational and personal challenges, and most importantly the open accessibility to Daesh's social media propaganda and forum.

Keywords: *Daesh ideology, attitude, perception, religious violence, Malaysians.*

INTRODUCTION

Daesh, also known as the Islamic State (IS), the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Leviant (ISIL), by far is the most lethal and deadliest Muslim terror movement that has rocked global security. It has even surpassed *al-Qaeda* in its attempted *jihadi* mission to turn the world into a caliphate system. Even though the movement seems to lose its land battle in the Middle East particularly in Syria, its ideological crusade continues to receive supports from the Muslim sympathizers. This has been shown by unabated suicide bomber attacks in various parts of the world. Most recently in the 2019 Easter Day Sri Lankan Bombings, hundreds of innocent people died (*Aljazeera Online* 2 May 2019; Burke 2019; McCants 2015). Some studies show that the Daesh comes into the world's attention when they started using women as suicide bombers (Loken & Zelenz 2018; Spencer 2016; Eggert, Jennifer 2015; Peresin & Cervone 2015; Davis 2013). They make women as weapons to attack security forces and civilians in Syria by installing bombs on the body and blowing them up. This tactic was seen to be very effective when the security forces did not expect the attack, but even worse when they used pregnant women to carry out an attack (Wan Fariza Alyati Wan Zakaria extracted from Saifulizam Mohamad 2017). The incident of the Surabaya bombings at three churches on May 13, 2018, for example, involving a dying actor consisting of parents and children in the same family, was a very alarming development. Based on these discourses and beliefs, among the factors affecting them to engage in this Daesh movement, especially women are the influence of husbands who had previously been involved; while for the girls or youths, is because they want to perform *jihad* and redeem for past sins. Some aspire to die as a martyr to redeem for their sins apart from the fallacy thoughts of receiving rewards from heaven.

The change of attack tactics is very alarming to national security if it is done in Malaysia. Security forces are particularly difficult to detect women in view of Malaysia's culture that women are rarely involved with crimes or terrorists. It is even more alarming that Daesh's attempt to move their operational centre to Southeast Asia and this could be an indication of a war

between Philippine troops and the militant Daesh in Marawi town in May 2017 that killed 500 lives and 125 of them were Philippine security guards (Franco 2017: 29). In line with this, the terror movement has established a state of Islamic Caliphate which to be based in Mindanao under the name of the Khatibah Nusantara. The movement circle involves Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and South Thailand and expressed loyalty to the Abu Sayyaf group as Daesh leader in Southeast Asia (Singh 2018; MyNewsHub, online 15 January 2018).

Looking at this situation, the threat of Daesh in Malaysia is alarming, and the country can be regarded as a target at any time (Kamarulnizam Abdullah & Ahmad Ridzuan 2019; Osman & Arosoaie 2018; Ahmad Fauzi 2016; Asalam 2017; Ahmad El-Muhammady 2016). This is because there are people in this country who are involved and support this struggle and they are willing to commit attacks as instructed by the leader of Daesh from the Southern Philippines. The group has planned several attacks in Malaysia before and the latest was an attempted attack during the closing ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur SEA Games (KL2017) last year after the attempted attack on the 60th National Parade at Dataran Merdeka. However, the plan was thwarted by the Royal Police of Malaysia (PDRM) by capturing 19 men consisting of 8 locals and 11 foreigners through 6 series of arrests. Through these series of arrests, the Counter Terrorism Division, PDRM Special Branch issued a statement that the main suspect as a planner for the attack was a Filipino member of the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group who infiltrated the entry into Sandakan, Sabah and then to Kuala Lumpur in December 2015 (Utusan Online 5 September 2017). The involvement of Malaysians is seen growing and they have started to attack without thinking about the laws or charges they may face.

The phenomenon demonstrates that Daesh's ideology has been infused by his followers to act beyond normal boundaries of human thought. It is even more unfortunate when actions are taken outside the limits and the true Islamic law. Daesh's ideology, which absorbs them, is no longer able to make them sane when willing to attack the innocent civilians. Hence, attacks in the form of Daesh's ideological or belief spread are very dangerous compared to the violence committed. Possible acts of violence can be detected or handled by the authorities, but ideology is difficult to be uncovered and even difficult to remove. According to Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, the then Home

Minister, up to October 6, 2017 there were 346 people, associated with Daesh, were detained with 95 of them were locals (*Utusan Online* 23 October 2017). The latest police data indicated that by the end of December 2018, a total of 413 individuals were arrested for their involvements in Daesh (Muhammad Aminuralif Atas talian 15 January 2019). The number of local arrests may less than one third, but it can raise concerns since militant theological ideas could act as a cancer that increasingly damages the minds of the people. This is because the ideology of dissemination and acceptance is clandestine, hence, difficult to detect. This disseminated ideology does not require many parties because it can be done through social media which certainly has various channels accessible to everyone. The level of national security will also be affected because the people's minds can be influenced by Daesh's ideology at any time. It is even more frightening when the propagation of this ideology is linked to Islam, both an individual and a society. Those who lack the knowledge of Islam will be easily influenced at any time (Rahimin Affandi Abdul Rahim, Mohd Anuar Ramli, Mohd Imran Abdul Razak, Muhammad Ikhlas Rosele & Siti Maimunah Kahal 2016: 111-112).

The reality is that Daesh's threat in Malaysia today is more focused on ideology or propaganda by spreading its violent doctrines through social media (Ahmad Sauffiyah 2016: 392-93). This spread is more dangerous when it comes to welcoming Malaysians, even though religious authorities and Islamic religious authorities debunking Daesh's theological claims. The main narrative of Daesh is to uphold a Caliph of Islamiyah while in the Qur'an does not state in detail the concept of the Islamic state to be established. Despite the doubts to accept this suggestion, Daesh believes that all Muslims are obliged to support their cause and whoever does not support or participate in the struggle is considered sinners and becomes apostates (Malaysian Air Force, 2018: 25-27). This example of belief is the one that becomes a serious security threat to the country. Every member who has been recruited can do anything on the basis of the fight against infidels including innocent civilians. Accordingly, Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, Assistant Director of the Bukit Aman Counter Terrorism Division, the threats are more dangerous today compare to that of 20 years ago because the current terrorist movements play the religious sentiments and debates (Hasnan Abdullah, Online, 2016).

Generally, Daesh's theological arguments have been influenced by the controversial views of Ibn Taymiyyah, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab and Sayed Qutb. Their ideas have been the central part of Wahhabism as well as Daesh. The 13th century Ibn Taymiyyah, for instance, came into direct conflict with the prevailing religious scholar for his bold views such as on veneration of saints and visitation to tomb shrines (Ibn Taymiyyah 2009: 5-7). Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahab, the 19th century Saudi religious leader shares that of Ibn Taymiyyah theological beliefs, while Sayyid Qutb, the leading member of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in the early 20th century, is known for his beliefs in advocating violent and offensive jihad. Their theological beliefs, among others include: the reconceptualization of Salafi *jihadism*; the obligatory duty of all Muslims to wage *qital jihadi* (physical warfare) and, the revitalization of Muslim powers and Islamic Syariah through the concept of *Harakah Islamiyah*. The revived Salafi *jihadi* concept advocates the idea that leaders who fail to uphold the laws of Allah, including the Muslims, are *kafir* (infidel) and *taghut* (putting oneself in a higher position and overstepping the rules of Allah) (Azh-Zhawahiri 2008: 30-31; Sayyid Quthb 2009: 20). It is a jihadi obligation that these leaders should be fought and eliminated. Furthermore, it is a duty for every Muslim to establish *Harakah Islamiyah* or the Islamic *daulah* (sovereignty). The world, therefore, is divided into *Darul Islam* (Islamic World) and *Darul Harb* (The world of unbelievers). Darul Islam would be a constant war with Darul Harb to uphold the sanctity and sovereignty of Islam.

It is interesting to note that Daesh's ideological struggle lies on the combination elements of *Salafi Jihadi* and the concept of *Takfiri*. Two central elements of Takfiri, firstly, Muslims are considered *kafir* (infidel) if they fail to believe in the essential tenets of Islam, and secondly violence is permissible to wage war against infidel (Dabiq 2014a, 2014b). Daesh's understanding of *jihad*, furthermore, is based on selected verses in the Quran, without considering the consensus of ulama on the interpretation of the verses.

Daesh argues that Islam justifies armed jihad and the abolition of the non-Islamic state. The movement uses the concept of *Jihad Takfiri* to urge followers to follow their *jihad* by force. In fact, Daesh members' beliefs are limited to the verses of the Quran and the traditions that support their struggle and reject any of the Quranic verses or hadiths that do not favour them. Therefore,

they hold on to the strict belief and are easy to judge others as infidels (*Sinar Harian*, Online 6 February 2017). This trend also allows the murder of leaders or Muslims who oppose their understanding of Islam especially in the sense of *jihad*. The movement is also associated with events before the Day of Judgment which is closely related to Sayyid Qutbs Salafi belief. It believes that Daesh is the movement described by the *hadith* (prophet saying), which is a black flag army from the east and will become the army of Imam Mahdi. Leaders of the movement are also convinced that they will win as promised by *Allah SWT* and strongly adhere to the *hadith* that narrates a series of wars and murders before the Day of Judgment (Farid Ridzwan 2016).

Despite its radical theological advocations, which have been rejected consensually by Muslim (sunni) *ulama* all over the world, Daesh continues to receive supports. Questions remain: what do ordinary Malaysian-Muslims understand about Daesh? Why some Muslims support and willingly join the movement? What are the opinion and perception of Malaysian-Muslims in general? Therefore, the objectives of this article are first, identifying factors that contributed to the influence of Daesh among Malaysians particularly the Muslims; second, identifying acceptance and rejection factors of the Daesh struggle in Malaysia, and third, examining the impact of Malaysia's understanding on Daesh on Malaysia's security.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

In order to understand this phenomenon, a study was conducted to identify the level of acceptance and rejection of Malaysians on Daesh radical ideology. The methodology of the study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative, covering the use of questionnaires, interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs). Qualitative methods are used to further quantify the collected quantitative data, especially in regard to perceptions and unpredictable views of the community.

Sampling

Given that this study is a combination of quantitative and qualitative, sampling was divided into two, namely 1) quantitative sampling, and 2) focused sampling of Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Research areas were divided into six zones, namely North, Central, South, East, Sabah and Sarawak. Below are the details:

1) Quantitative Sampling

A total of 5232 people aged between 18 years old and over 50 were randomly selected comprising those from three different agencies namely security agency, education and the public. For the security sector, selected departments involved include military and, agencies under the Ministry of Home Affairs – various units/departments at the ministry, PDRM, the Prison Department, Immigration Department and Border Control Agency of Malaysia (AKSEM). Education sector consists of lecturers, staff and university students as well as teachers, staff and secondary school students. For the general public, randomly selected respondents involve those who are self-employed, industry, merchants, housewives and youth.

2) Qualitative sampling

A total of 60 respondents aged between 20 and 45 years who have agreed to be interviewed and involved in the FGD. The respondents were also given several questions to be discussed among themselves. Nonetheless, each group was allowed to discuss beyond the given questions. The FGD discussions were led by one of the participants in the group to allow free flow of ideas.

Research Instruments

This combined method requires two different instruments: 1) Quantitative study instruments and 2) Qualitative study instruments. The two instruments are described in detail as follows:

1) Quantitative study Instruments

This research instrument has been adapted from the original instrument developed by Che Aziz et al (2016). The results of the pilot study found that the questionnaire was in line with Cronbach's alpha for Daesh acceptance $\alpha = .89$. In actual study, $\alpha = .90$. Reverse scores will be conducted for negative (rejection) questions such as the "the suitability of Daesh ideology and struggle among multi-ethnicity in Malaysia ..."

2) Qualitative study Instruments

The questionnaires were developed by researchers to answer the objective of the study. Among the questions posed to informants are as follows:

- a.* Understanding of Daesh as a movement
 - i. What does Daesh organization mean?
 - ii. Why is Daesh formed?
 - iii. What is the original name for Daesh and who is the founder of this movement?
 - iv. Why is the government against Daesh?
 - v. Is Daesh a single movement or consisting of many movements?
 - vi. What do the members of Daesh do in Malaysia and at the international level?
 - vii. What is their purpose of practising violent activities??

- b.* Factors that can be the reasons for rejection
 - i. Is Daesh a terrorist organization and who labels it?
 - ii. Why is Daesh a threat to the people of Malaysia?
 - iii. Is it true that Daesh is a terrorist organization formed by a certain group to wipe out Muslims?
 - iv. I believe that there will be a real Islamic movement to fight or abolish the Daesh today. Yes or no, why?

Research Procedure

This research procedure followed a systematic process to ensure that this mix-method approach can be implemented in a more orderly, comprehensive and efficient manner. Below are study procedures:

- 1) Obtaining a letter of appointment as a researcher from the Malaysian Institute of Public Safety (IPSOM) to conduct this study;
- 2) Through a supporting letter from the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Home Affairs (IGP), IPSOM applied for permission to conduct studies on government staff at the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Defence, the PDRM, the Immigration Department, the Civil Defence Department (JPAM) Prevention of Smuggling (UPP) or now known as the Border Security Agency (AKSEM). Similarly, the permission from the State Government to conduct research at religious schools under the control of the State Government was also obtained;
- 3) During the process of applying for permission from the agencies involved, the researchers provided survey questionnaires and FGD questions as well as conduct pilot studies to ensure that the FGD questionnaires and questions were ready for distribution as well as ensuring the suitability for this study; and
- 4) For Study 1 and 2, surveys and FGDs involved 6 zones, Zone 1: North, Zone 2: South, Zone 3: Central, Zone 4: East, Zone 5: Sabah and Zone 6: Sarawak. Both studies run simultaneously with surveys (Questionnaire). For the general public and government staff, respondents were randomly selected whereby 10 people for each area representing their respective institutions. The FGD process was conducted once per zone involving different background groups in line with the established sample. All informants needed to sign a letter of authorization to record all conversations in the FGD study.

Data Analysis

For the qualitative analysis, descriptive statistics using IBM SPSS 24.0 software data was used to obtain clear and easy numbers for public acceptance. While for the qualitative data, the real arguments voiced by the respondents were used to support the findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Respondents' Demography

The following table (Table 1) is the overall respondents' demography by categories of security and defence as well as educational personnel and the civilians.

Table 1: Respondent Demography

	Security and Defence Sector		Civilians		Education Sector		Overall Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Gender								
Male	1059	20.2	726	13.9	1210	23.1	2995	57.2
Female	388	7.4	633	12.1	1216	23.2	2237	42.8
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100
Age								
20 and below	4	0.1	63	1.2	1056	20.2	1123	21.5
21-30	454	8.7	621	11.9	687	13.1	1762	33.7
31-40	653	12.5	324	6.2	374	7.1	1351	25.8
41-50	208	4.0	225	4.3	221	4.2	654	12.5
51 and above	128	2.4	126	2.4	88	1.7	342	6.5
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100
Status								

Single	259	5.0	584	11.2	1741	33.3	2584	49.4
Married	1155	22.1	719	13.6	662	12.7	2530	48.4
Widow/Widower	33	0.6	62	1.2	23	0.4	118	2.3
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100
Zone								
Sabah	66	1.3	241	4.6	449	8.6	756	14.4
Sarawa	0	0	143	2.7	427	8.2	570	10.9
k South	17	0.3	360	6.9	412	7.9	789	15.1
Central	698	13.3	269	5.1	234	4.5	1201	23.0
East	139	2.7	193	3.7	333	6.4	665	12.7
North	527	10.1	153	2.9	571	10.9	1251	23.9
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100
Educational Level								
Did not Attend school	0	0	3	0.1	1	0.0	4	0.1
Completed Primary 6	0	0	10	0.2	90	1.7	100	1.9
LCE/SRP/PMR/PT 3	66	1.3	111	2.1	451	8.6	628	12.0
SPM/SPAM	851	16.3	617	11.8	448	8.6	1916	36.6
STPM/STAM/DIP	367	7.0	328	6.3	810	15.5	1505	28.8
First Degree	104	2.0	196	3.7	384	7.3	684	13.1
Master's Degree	57	1.1	52	1.0	91	1.7	200	3.8
Doctorate	2	0.0	4.2	0.8	151	2.9	195	3.7
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100
Religious Education								
Formal	1210	23.1	1066	20.4	1945	37.2	4221	80.7
Non-formal	237	4.5	293	5.6	481	9.2	1011	19.3
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100

Formal Religious

Education

National	1218	23.3	1149	22.0	1514	28.9	3881	74.2
Primary								
school	217	4.1	169	3.2	749	14.3	1135	21.7
Government								
Religious	1	0.0	12	0.2	41	0.8	162	3.1
school								
Private								
Religious								
School								
<i>Madrasah</i> Total	11	0.2	29	0.6	122	2.3	54	1.0
	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100

Non-Formal

Religious Education

Family	1027	19.6	1121	21.4	2118	40.5	4226	81.5
Mosque@ <i>Musolla</i>	328	6.3	141	2.7	189	3.6	658	12.6
Peers/Friends	26	0.5	48	0.9	45	0.9	119	2.3
Internet Social/ Media	59	1.1	32	0.6	47	0.9	138	2.6
Other	7	0.1	17	0.3	27	0.5	51	1.0
Total	1447	27.7	1359	26.0	2426	46.4	5232	100

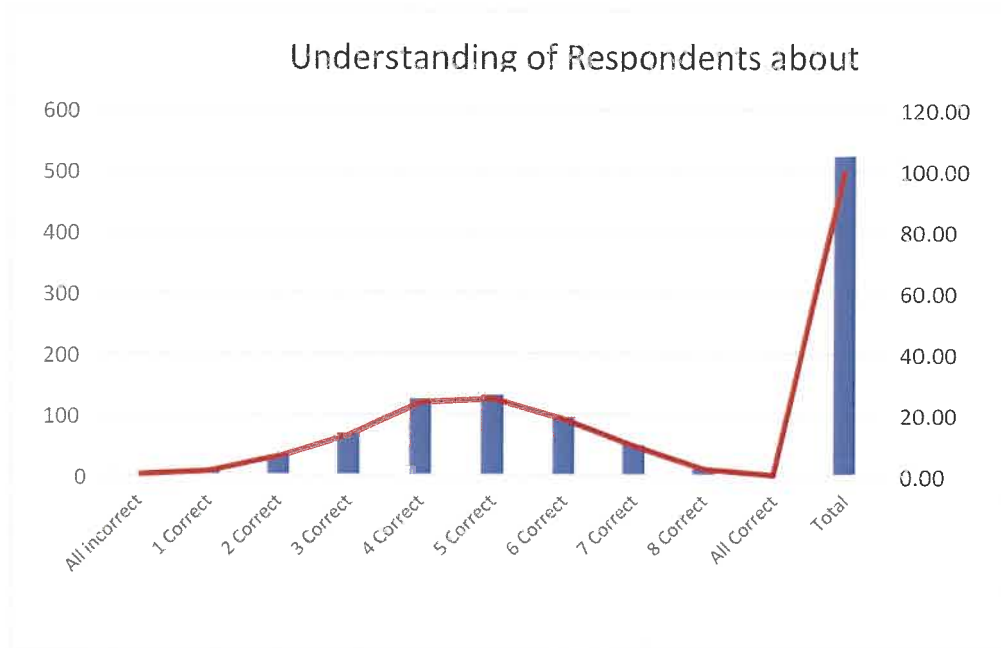
Understanding, Knowledgeability and Factors that Influencing Malaysians' Perception on Daesh.

Malaysian-Muslims generally received information about Daesh via television channels and newspapers through news of arrests by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM). This basic medium of communication is a commonly used method by the government for information dissemination to the general public. However, the public may choose multiple social media channels to get information about Daesh, which some of them were trapped by and attracted to the ideology of this terrorist group. Understanding and knowledge of Daesh can influence someone to support Daesh's crusade. Lack of in-depth understanding of Islamic teachings will be one of the probability factors that one supports Daesh. This situation would certainly hurt the government if many Malaysians do not understand and know about Daesh. The research data show that out of 5232 respondents from Security, Defence, Education and the Civilians, only one responded correctly from the 8 questions posed about Daesh. Overall, 4146 (79.2%) respondents successfully answered at least 4 correct questions while 66 (1.3%) respondents were able to answer one question correctly. Based on this data, it shows that the level of understanding among Malaysians against Daesh is still low despite news about Daesh have been exposed frequently in local and international media. Despite various efforts by respected security and religious authorities to develop understanding about Daesh, the acceptance of the people is still weak. The following Table 2 and Figure 1 display the level of knowledge and understanding of respondents about Daesh.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Respondents' Knowledge Level on Daesh

Variables	All Incorrect	1 Correct	2 Correct	3 Correct	4 Correct	5 Correct	6 Correct	7 Correct	8 Correct	All Correct	Total
Security and Defence	2 0.0%	14 0.3%	110 2.1%	171 3.3%	383 7.3%	330 6.3%	244 4.7%	159 3.0%	34 0.6%	0 0.0%	1447 27.7%
Civilians	2 0.0%	23 0.4%	84 1.6%	221 4.2%	332 6.3%	370 7.1%	219 4.2%	81 1.5%	27 0.5%	0 0.0%	1359 26.0%
Education Centre	8 0.2%	29 0.6%	123 2.4%	299 5.7%	541 10.3%	620 11.9%	501 9.6%	261 5.0%	43 0.8%	1 0.0%	2426 46.4%
Total	12 0.2%	66 1.3%	317 6.1%	691 13.2%	1256 24%	1320 25.2%	964 18.4%	501 9.6%	104 2.0%	1 0.0%	5232 100%

Figure 1: Understanding of Respondents about Daes Acceptance and Rejection of Malaysians towards Daesh Ideology and



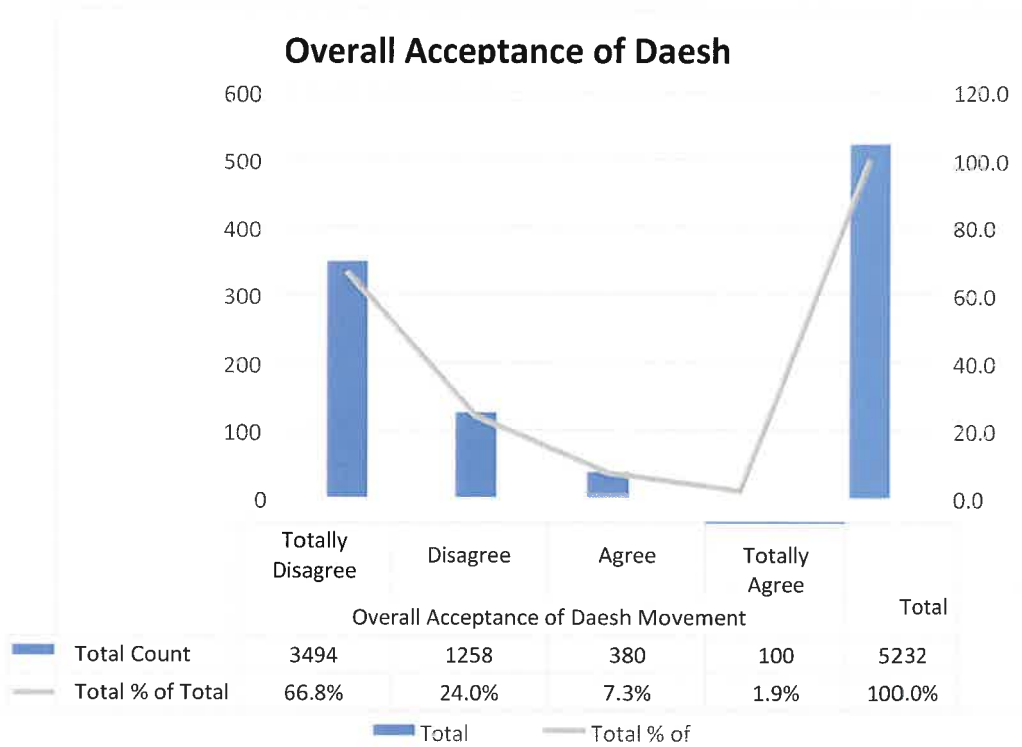
Movement

Malaysia is a multiracial country and forms various religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The level of sophistication, rational and assessment for each citizen is different and it is likely to cause disadvantages if not coordinated well. The acceptance of a handful of individuals to the ideology and movement of Daesh is one of the potential security threats in Malaysia. However, this acceptance is not serious but can be a cause of concern for the government as those who accept or support this movement can potentially influence others if not contained. Those involved in Daesh would subsequently seek to influence others because the basis of their struggle and strategy is to manipulate Islam in order to gain support. Based on Table 3 and Figure 2, the findings show that from four given scales (1-1.75, 1.76-2.5, 2.51- 3.25, 3.26-4.00) and the overall number obtained, 480 (9.2%) of the total respondents agreed to accept the movement of Daesh. From the total respondents who accepted Daesh, 100 (1.9%) strongly agreed to accept Daesh; 46 (0.9%) from the education and 45 (0.9%) civilians while security personnel contributed only 9 (0.2%) for strongly agreed.

Table 3: Number and Percentage by Category of Respondents based on Respondents' Overall Acceptance of the Daesh Movement

Overall Acceptance of the Daesh Movement						
Variables	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	
Security and Defence	1093	313	32	9	1447	
	20.9%	6.0%	0.6%	0.2%	27.7%	
Civilians	762	360	191	46	1359	
	14.6%	6.9%	3.7%	0.9%	26.0%	
Education Sector	1639	585	157	45	2426	
	31.3%	11.2%	3.0%	0.9%	46.4%	
Total	3494	1258	380	100	5232	
	66.8%	24.0%	7.3%	1.9%	100%	

Figure 2: Overall Acceptance of Daesh Movement



Discussion

The above findings lead us to the two major discussions. Firstly, to interpret Malaysian- Muslims’ understanding on Daesh movement. Questions are how do they understand what Daesh really is? What are their sources of knowledge, and how those sources lead to their understanding on the movement? Secondly, the subsequent discussion also analyses the acceptance level of Malaysian-Muslims on Daesh theological beliefs. Each discussion will be accompanied with quantitative data in the form of Table or figure. In addition to that, the discussion would also derive its analysis from the FGD data.

Understanding about Daesh

Although 79.2% of the people (Table 1) were able to answer 4 out of 9 questions about their understanding of Daesh, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) data shows that there are still weaknesses in terms of academic and scientific knowledge among respondents. Respondents did not show that they have extensively read and understand Daesh such as its history, background, strategy, actors, leaders and area involved. Most of the respondents have heard about Daesh and have superficial knowledge on what Daesh is all about.. For example, one of the informants spoke about their understanding as follow,

"In my view IS [Daesh] in Malaysia is not yet up to a worrying level. [This is] because in Malaysia many realize IS is not a good group to follow. Many Malaysians are aware of IS's disadvantages. Like no.1 said, there are only a handful of those who are affected and influenced by this IS. This clearly indicates the lack of understanding of religion and as a result Daesh movement can influence them.

However, few of the informants appeared to have their own opinion, but basically show their lack of knowledge on Daesh. Some even show misunderstanding of Daesh's ideological crusade (1.3%). These informants were managed to answer correctly one question. This weakness will have an impact if it is not controlled since they could be easily influenced and manipulated by Daesh members to at least support their cause. One of the informants from the northern zone argued that,

As we see that it was among the ordinary people who join Daesh because they just want to learn more about Islam. Scholars were not attracted to the group. This is because informed Malaysians were more interested what's happening around them rather than looking outside issue. Those who join Daesh are basically not educated and have lack of

religious knowledge. That's why they join Daesh

In addition, Malaysian-Muslims' opinion whether Daesh is bad or otherwise, is based on either their own understanding or information provided by the government. In general, their attitude is parallel to the government's position – Daesh is an international terrorist group that uses religion for its political objectives. One of the respondents in the FGD said that,

... this group uses weapons against its enemy. The act does not in line with Islamic teachings. The act of slaughtering people, burning people alive, killing children, family and places of worship is something that Islam prohibits but is done by the Daesh militant. "

Most respondents understand that lack of religious knowledge is a major factor why uninformed Muslim join Daesh. According to one respondent,

In my view, IS in Malaysia has not yet reached to an alarming stage. This is because in Malaysia many realize that IS is not a good group to follow to. As we can see in the mass media, many bad news on this IS. So, many Malaysians are aware of IS's disadvantages. Like no.1 said, there are only a handful of people influenced by this IS and most of them lack the religious knowledge. "

The findings also reinforce previous studies and reports which indicate that many Malaysians were attracted to and influenced by Daesh's ideology due to the lack of knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of Islamic teachings (Nacim 2016: 14; *Daily Sabah Online* 16 August 2016)

Acceptance and Rejection of Daesh

Based on Figure 2, responses to “strongly disagree” and “disagree” refer to those who reject Daesh; while “agree” and “strongly agree” indicate respondents’ agreement with or support for the movement. Data obtained shows that out of 5232 respondents, 66.8% rejected Daesh. Out of this, 24% indicates “disagreed”, which falls under the category of rejection to the movement. This percentage shows a high rejection compared to the those who accept Daesh. In this survey, 7.3% shows the “agreement,” while another 1.9% indicates a “strong agreement” with Daesh. In total, 9.2 % indicates their support toward Daesh. This figure shows a declining support to 3.4% as reported Che Aziz et. Al. (2016) and Poushter (2015). Despite the data showing a significant percentage of Malaysian-Muslim rejection toward Daesh, we should be concern with those who show the support to the group's struggle and theological appeals. This is because those who involved in this study came from very critical sectors in the national development and management of the country - security and education. Those involve in the security sector are the one who should protect the country from subversive elements that could harm the country. Furthermore, the presence of minority (that support Daesh) in the education sector could affect the development of the personality and mind of students and teachers. Hence, this study suggests that these minorities could have an impact on the stability of a country. History has shown that separatists, militants or terrorists in most countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan and India, are a minority group but can jeopardize the country's economic and political security.

The findings also show that Malaysia cannot escape from Daesh attacks if there is no strict control to curb the spread of the ideology. Respondents' rejection to Daesh struggle is due to their strong understanding of the Islamic teachings. They could distinguish between the true teachings of Islam and that of against, which what Daesh is doing. For instance, a respondent explained that,

As a Muslim, Islam does not teach us as they (IS) do because we have a predetermined rule as well as laws that have been agreed upon by all. So, killing, beheading people and beating are beyond the humanitarian deeds.

But attention should be given to those who support the struggle of Daesh. The respective agencies, for instance the religious departments, need to carry ongoing information and counter-narrative programs for the targeted groups in the security and education sectors. This is to ensure Daesh's ideology and narrative would not be able to infiltrate and influence their minds and perceptions. Some have argued that Daesh is a violent political movement by making Islam an instrument of influence and support (Wrights 2017; McCants 2015, Stern 2015). However, there are two sides of people - either supporting or rejecting the movement. The FGD sessions reveal that some informants tend to support and agree with Daesh. Some of them even agreed with Daesh's attempt to bring back the caliphate-based systems and defended the rights of Muslim from being politically oppressed by Western countries. At the same time some of the informants in the FGD session disagreed or did not support the acts of violence committed by Daesh. They argued that the violence act is incongruent with the Islamic laws or practices such as killing civilians, burning people alive, beheading them and others. This issue was highlighted by one of the informants,

ISIS (Daesh) uses the Islamic name only, but basically it does not uphold the Islamic law and members do not know that Islam has a "syariat" (laws and rules). So, the basis of IS's ideological struggle does not come from the Muslims but un-Islamic. It just wants to raise the high sense of jihad. So, they instil a small element of Islam in to attract interest. So, those who got involve were basically deceived. IS also, like what No 4 has said [other informant] aims to divide Muslims. IS does not represent the true idea of Islamic army that adheres to what Islam teaches.

It can be deduced from the above discussion that those who support the struggle of Daesh appear to have shallow knowledge on Islam. Those who involved believe that their *jihadi* would be rewarded with heaven and died as martyrdom. For example, an informant said,

... many ustadz at religious schools agree that IS does not represent a true Islamic army. But there are Malaysians who join IS because (of a belief) that, as commented by No 2 (other informant), the Eastern Islamic movement would inject jihadi spirit through the internet. Jihad is the path to heaven i.e. die as martyrs. Some people who are new to religion, want to know the religion, but want to die quickly as martyrs. And they bring IS to open the eyes of people who are new to the religion of jihad ...die as martyrs ... promised heaven. They do not understand IS and just want to join it. They do not study what jihad is about. Malaysians who join IS do not deeply learn the religious. They just blindly think that they want to enter paradise. Major target of typical Muslims is only one i.e. to enter paradise. So, we should be wary of people who do not understand Islam.

Anti-social attitude, reluctance to learn about Islam, and easily influenced by the internet information are some explanation why Malaysian-Muslims are easily swayed and attracted to Daesh's theological logics and arguments. Saifuddin & Sualman (2017) suggest that perhaps the country should introduce an online newspaper that could help to disseminate true information of Islam. The portal should expose that Daesh is on the wrong path and thus, Malaysians should reject its ideological menace. While the situation is still under control, tight controls must be exercised by the Government to curb the Daesh pervasive influence on the people through social media (Ahmad Sauffiyan, 2016).

It should be noted that Daesh has manipulated various Quranic verses and hadiths to the extent that manage to influence those who have shallow understanding of the Islamic teachings. Thus, it can be argued that indepth knowledge on Islam can lower the the chances of them being influenced by Daesh ideology. Likewise, those who lack the knowledge on Islamic teachings are the easy targets.

Conclusion

The results of the quantitative findings and FGDs clearly show that the understanding of and acceptance to Daesh has inverse relationships. This means that if a person has a superficial knowledge on Islamic teachings, he or she tend to easily accept Daesh's theological rationale. Daesh's struggle today is evolving from day to day by recruiting new members. In Malaysia, several arrests were made against the local youths who are willing to fight for “real Islam” together with Daesh although the movements’ act and the ideological struggle are clearly anti-thesis to prevalent Islamic teachings. Data from the survey shows that the majority of Malaysian- Muslims does understand that Daesh, as a movement, has deviated from Islam. Thus, Daesh and its associates in the region may have difficulties in engaging and spreading out their ideas. Nevertheless, based on the FGD findings and suggestions, the government should continue to play a proactive role by using social media to ensure that the public does understand the threats and the ideological deviation of Daesh.

➤ A correct understanding of Islam is an essential factor to protect ordinary Malaysia-Muslims from being swayed by Daesh influences. An informed and knowledgeable Malaysians would also be able to evaluate and ascertain some misguided news and information. Therefore, there are several measures that can be adopted by the government and local communities. One of them is multiple and concerted efforts to relay counter-narrative message in government departments, institutes of higher education, local communities, through e-information channelled in social media in debunking Daesh claims and *jihadi* beliefs (see examples from Stern & Berger, 2015). In addition, there is a need for strict enforcements by respective security agencies by using advanced technology in tracking and capturing Daesh members. At the same time, intelligent cooperation between the various local and international security agencies should be enhanced and strengthened to curb Daesh influences. Regional cooperation at ASEAN level as well as inter-regional coordination should be intensified through sharing of information and expertise. This would further strengthen efforts to curb Daesh’s version of jihadi struggle and ideological threats.

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